

A first transport of opium from Laos to Saigon was arranged. But its route in Seigon had been poorly prepared and the drug had to be stored for some time in the GCMA storerooms. The Customs Service, warned by a malicious denunciation, came to verify the presence of opium in the GCMA storerooms.

Evil tongues, and especially some of the press just waiting for any incident capable of discrediting the command, made much of this affair which even provided, much later, a chosen weapon to those who tried to dishonor General Salan for various reasons.

At any event General Salan and Lieutenant-Colonel Grall, having reached the end of their tour, returned to France. Nevertheless General Salan compiled a complete report of this matter for General Navarre, who was to succeed him. He informed me of it as the successor of Lieutenant-Colonel Grall.

As soon as he arrived in Indochina, General Navarre was informed of the report. He summoned me and said, "You must continue this affair properly. Come speak to me of it."

It so happens that the Special Services of all the countries of the world are induced to act, in order to serve the policy of their government, outside the framework of habitual laws in order to be able to fulfill assigned missions, of capital importance to their countries.

What is asked of them is to accomplish these missions by appropriate means without their government being compromised or even suspected. The operators know that, in case of failure, they will not be supported by anyone and that they will bear the entire responsibility for a mission accepted with knowledge of the facts and poorly performed.

The opium traffic in the Far East was included in this category of missions officially unaccepted, but necessary for the conduct of the war in Indochina.

The problem of the Meo opium was regulated in the following way.

Touby, the king of the Meos charged with circulating this opium, made contact with Le Van Vien, a former chief of the Binh Xuyen rebels under the name of Bay Vien who had turned to the French troops in 1948. At this time they had other police in Saigon, Le Van Vien received the opium and paid Touby for it. The GCMA was only in charge of transportation.

When Touby had collected from 100 to 200 kilograms of merchandise from his Meos, operation X was launched.

An airplane, always with the same crew, transported materiel to the Plaine des Jarres. On its return it loaded boxes of opium. Before returning to its base, it landed at the GCMA training ground, restricted to all personnel except those of this unit. A truckdriver (always the same and in whom I had absolute trust) directly took over the cargo from the airplane and took it to Le Van Vien, notified the day before. Then Touby would come to be paid. On the way he put into the boxes X funds of 5,000 piastres per telegram transported, and then gave each of his Meos the price of his merchandise. The X funds were used to support the Laos underground fighters.

This process had a double advantage; on the one hand it allowed the Meos to circulate their opium, and on the other hand it allowed the GCMA to support a considerable number of underground fighters.

I had absolutely forbidden any opium traffic outside of operation X. This was really easy to control at all echelons. The Laos officers knew exactly how much I received in every operation. I myself handled these funds, and I released them for justified requests for the needs of the underground fighters.

Operation X took place only 2 or 3 times per year.

When these funds were exhausted, Captain de Batin, in charge of the Meo underground on the Tra Keng plateau, organized a small shipment of opium to Siam for

the needs of these underground fighters. He reported it to me, but this route escaped my control. I seriously reproached de Bazin and told him that, if he performed a new operation of this kind on his own authority, I would relieve him of his command. De Bazin had a scrupulous honesty that had succeeded perfectly with the Meos. But, despite my remark, he made a second operation to Siam and again reported it to me. In such a delicate affair I did not want the CGMA officers to be able to be suspected of trafficking. I decided to immediately relieve de Bazin of his command. For me this was a very painful decision, because I had a great deal of respect for de Bazin, who had succeeded in a remarkable way and who was an officer of great value. He was literally in love with his job and had the respect and affection of all the Meos. Under these conditions, in order to be sure of executing the decision I had taken, I used a service note to designate Captain Sassi, who had just arrived from France but who had been parachuted in 1945 to the Tra Ning plateau to start guerilla operations against the Japanese, to replace Captain de Bazin. I placed Captain de Bazin at the disposition of the TAPI. Then, having forwarded my service notes to the General Staff and being unable to reverse my decision, I went to the Tra Ning plateau with Sassi to announce to de Bazin that he was relieved. I intended to bring de Bazin with me on my return. This relief from his command, unexpected despite my threat, was a very hard blow for de Bazin. I permitted him to remain for 2 weeks to pass his authority over to Sassi who, without any difficulty at all, took over the affairs with the Meo underground. As for de Bazin, he immediately received the command of a parachute batallion. On 1 May 1954 he was the last to jump over Dien Bien Phu.

The Navarre Plan

Appointed the new Commander-in-Chief in Indochina on 8 May 1953, General Navarre arrived in Saigon on 19 May. He was unknown to most of the officers in Indochina. He was a gentleman and from the mainland. For this reason he had rarely served abroad, and especially not in Indochina. The attitude he found at Saigon and at Hanoi was one of departure. The entire team brought to Indochina in 1950 by General de Lattre and General Salan was reaching the end of its tour and was about to return. Therefore new teams had to be composed.

This was also true of my echelon. General Salan, whom I had known since 1934, was going to return, as was his second in command, Col. Gracieux, with whom I had worked in close collaboration since 1946, i.e., since the creation of the Colonial Paratroopers, and who had never tired of helping me.

Grall, who had been the creator and the soul of the GCMA, who had never hesitated to take risky initiatives to carry out delicate missions, was leaving without any hope of returning.

Col. de Boliardiere who, without worrying about tables of organization, had always given us the necessary personnel in difficult situations, was going to finish the year of extension which had been granted to him. But for the GCMA his departure would be an irreparable loss. General Gilles was finally going to command the TAPI and I knew that, from the beginning, I would run up against his more or less declared hostility.

However, I had around me a team of remarkable officers. All of them had understood the importance of the GCMA mission, and they had decided to do everything needed for success.

After he had established contact with the general commanding the various territories of Indochina and established the general situation with his various service chiefs, General Navarre summoned me. I did not know him, I can even say

that I had never heard him mentioned. However, I have kept an excellent impression of this first interview, one which was never belied.

I had prepared my account in minute detail. For 20 minutes the General listened to me attentively and appeared to be very interested in our experiments, our failures and our successes. I informed him of our certainty that the mountain peoples who covered the greater part of the Indochinese territory had been won over by us. Now, the Viet Minh had set up its rear bases and its vital lines of communication with China ran through the mountains, in the midst of these peoples. Therefore regaining control of these people was a capital point. And in the current situation this was nothing but a question of time and means in my opinion.

General Navarre appeared to me to be convinced. He told me that my account had interested him and that he would soon recall me to inform me of his decisions concerning the GCMA and its utilization.

The consequences of the arrival of General Gilles to TAPI were not long in coming. The GCMA had retained control over the EMC-BAP, i.e., the operation of the airborne operations. We have seen how these two organizations, commanded by a single leader, had facilitated the beginning of the GCMA. I knew that General Gilles intended to take them back under his control very fast.

Certainly, at the point which we had reached, they were no longer necessary for us. In anticipating this separation, I had used GCMA funds to buy the materiel with which they were equipped, so as to be able to keep it, and I had given my Regional Representation leaders instructions to form airborne operational sections with the personnel proper to the GCMA for the purpose of replacing them. But it was inevitable that this separation would cause a tangible loss of manpower for the GCMA.

The service record fixing the terms, appearing on 1 December 1953, was immediately payable at Hanoi. Therefore General Gilles had to completely reconstitute

a new EMO with the TAPI material, which demanded a certain amount of time. Thus, a shop which operated well, which had produced satisfaction in all areas, was dismantled for simple reasons of vainglory. But thanks to the comradeship and the understanding reigning among all the officers in the other Regional Representations, the separation was effective only on paper. Cooperation between the GCMA and the EMO in the other Regional Representations never ceased.

Nevertheless the most important problem remained that of the 8th ECCP, which had just finished its training at Cape-Saint-Jacques. One morning General Gilles summoned me to his office and said to me with a satisfied smile: "I have taken the 8th ECCP back."

I knew that I would be wasting my time if I tried to convince General Gilles of the supreme interest we had in preserving it: I would only increase his animosity with respect to the GCMA. General Gilles thought he had only played a dirty trick on me without any real consequences. If General Salan had still been in Indochina, I would have found it easy to defend my point of view, and I would have come out ahead.

But General Navarre had just arrived. General Gilles, the conqueror of Na San, had far more influence on him than I could have. In addition the General had other things to do besides being directly involved in a little parachute battalion. Finally, I did not want him to think that the GCMA was a cause of friction among the parachutists.

Thus, three months of training of an entire battalion had been turned into pure loss. Without any reason we had undergone an irreparable loss. The absence of this battalion would prevent us from giving the combat strength which they should have had to our underground fighters in the most critical periods....

Like any general officer appointed to an important position, General Navarre owed it to himself to study the best way of fulfilling the mission entrusted to

him as a function of the means he had available, and then of informing his subordinates of his instructions by giving them, as a function of his capabilities, the necessary means for each one to participate in the execution of the general mission within the framework to be established for him.

General Salan, an old Indochina hand, had succeeded in blocking the Viet offensive of autumn 1952 and of inflicting heavy losses on Giap's battle corps.

But the battle corps was reformed every summer in China in total tranquility. It was obvious that it would return in autumn 1953 even more powerful than in the preceding year. As a function of this situation, General Salan had left to General Navarre the major outlines of the plan which he had intended to apply himself if he had remained in Indochina. General Navarre was to take inspiration from this plan to a great degree.

As anticipated, one month after having summoned me, General Navarre had me called back. He clearly explained to me the major outlines of the plan which he had conceived and the role which he requested the GCMA to fulfill for its execution.

Since the communists had reached the Tonkin frontier, there had only been in Indochina seven Mobile Groups, established by General de Lettre in 1950 to oppose the Viet Minh divisions formed in China. Navarre considered this number insufficient. He intended to create new ones in order to have available a more powerful, better trained, more mobile battle corps capable of overcoming the Viet battle corps.

For this purpose, since he could not hope for new men from France, it was necessary to rejuvenate the greatest number of static units possible and to replace them whenever it was possible by units provided by the Associated States, the number of which had to be increased.

A redistribution plan was established for all of Indochina. During the summer important pacification operations in the Delta had allowed the newly

formed units of the Associated States to be installed in the best possible conditions. During 1953-1954, which he considered to be a dangerous turning point, he would avoid a general battle with the enemy battle corps.

Here is what General Navarre expected of the GCMA in this total plan. He informed me of his intentions to evacuate:

1) Na San. The entrenched camp had resisted remarkably well the preceding year under the orders of Col. Gilles, but it was a tempting objective for the Viets, who risked taking it. In addition excellent troops were immobilized there. The General wanted to recover them.

2) Phong Saly. This province of Upper Laos was attached to Hanoi for facility in supply and command. It was occupied by a Laotian battalion commanded by one of my classmates, Lahosse, and had a high proportion of European staff. General Navarre intended to recover this battalion, or at least the European staff.

3) Lai Chau, the capital of the Thai Country. This city is situated at the crossroads of two deep valleys, the Black River valley and the Nam Ls valley. The fact that it had held the previous year is because it had not been heavily assaulted. But it was indefensible, and remained a tempting prey for a Viet raid. There as well General Navarre intended to recover the troops occupying it.

He intended to leave this entire zone under the control of the underground fighters, whom he requested me to put into position.

"Your credits," he said to me, "are clearly insufficient for what I am asking you. Up to now you have had at your disposal credits for 12 partisan companies, and I shall give you enough for 50 so that you can develop them to the maximum. Later we shall see if it is possible for me to increase them. Make contact with General Alessandri who is responsible for the development of the Associated Armies. He is an old Indochinese, he is very interested in your problems, and he will be able to help you a great deal. What I am now asking you is to study, in the phase they have reached, how well your underground fighters can help me recover the troops

from these three cities and the assistance they will be able to supply during the evacuation period, which is always troublesome."

I quickly contacted General Alessandri. It was very easy: his son-in-law, Captain Duvivier, formed part of my general staff, he was aware of Navarre's plan, and he was completely willing to help us with his influence and his advice.

He told me that, "Your underground fighters would have to be quite developed next year so that the entire High Region could be recovered without difficulty. In short you must be 'the artillery' of General Navarre, the ones who prepare the terrain to allow easy occupation of it."

Thus I found, with both General Navarre and General Alessandri, a perfect understanding and assistance which was never to be belied.

I hurried to Hanoi to see my comrade Fournier, who methodically encouraged the extension of the underground fighters, so that together we could study the way in which we could facilitate the execution of Navarre's plan in the area assigned to us.

Captain Hebert, as we have seen, had succeeded remarkably well in establishing himself in the mountainous region between Na San and Dien Bien Phu.

The Colibri fighters had 1,000 armed men, commanded by an exceptionally valuable noncommissioned officer, Sergeant-Major Chatel, by the end of June, scarcely one month after its formation.

The Calamar underground, commanded by Sergeant-Major Schneider, was approaching a thousand weapons.

The Aiglon underground, commanded by Ansiedei and Maljean, had already been able to arm 1,250 partisans.

Hebert had been able to acquire a small airplane and maneuver among these three underground groups; he was particularly involved in supplying them with armament and ammunition.

Fournier, Hebert and I went to these three undergrounds in succession. The people received us warmly and the armed men with enthusiasm. The French noncommissioned officers, who alone commanded more men than are in a battalion, were perfectly at ease in their command, obeyed and respected by everyone.

Before the end of August Hebert would have more than 3,000 armed underground fighters under him. The Cape Saint-Jacques School was capable of providing him with all of the radio teams which they needed.

We agreed that, when General Navarre might decide to evacuate Na San, the underground fighters would descend from the mountains at night and occupy Son La at daybreak, thanks to the numerous confederates whom they had in the city. They would also lure to the city the small number of Viets who were around Na San. They would block their return route for the number of days necessary for the evacuation.

I asked them to study a very specific plan with respect to the evacuation on the basis of these very general guidelines.

Therefore the evacuation of Na San did not pose any problems for Hebert nor for Fournier. This was the plan I proposed to present to General Navarre.

We also went to Phong Saly to see my friend Lahosse. The fighters in the Phong Saly province were developing normally under the control of Captain Mourier and Lt. Richard.

Fournier did not see any trouble in the fact that all of the European staffs were recovered, but he asked that all of the native ranks and the snipers of the region remained in their places. In this way the mistake in the evacuation of Sam Neua the year before would not be repeated. These men would reinforce the underground fighters and, if the Viets tried to overpower the village, it would be easy to make life impossible for them by setting up many ambushes along the highway against them.

This left Lai Chau. Its geographic position made the problem complicated. Certainly the Cardamone underground was in full expansion. It had about 200 weapons furnished by the GCIM and about 300 weapons recovered with the Meo and Thai partisans who had come to our side. But it had been set up too recently, and could not oppose an attack in force by the Viet units in the direction of Lai Chau as soon as our evacuation plans became known.

General Navarre had proposed to me to leave one or two of the battalions stationed at Lai Chau or in the region at my disposal, units which would then be recovered by the underground fighters, as a large part of the Sam Neua garrison had been the year before. But, since the Lai Chau terrain was situated at the bottom of a narrow valley, airplanes leaving it rose so well when they were loaded and passed just above the heads of the partisans. Therefore it was necessary to hold it firmly, which was not the case. A few very accurate automatic weapons would have easily brought down all of the aircraft taking off from the valley.

This is what I explained to General Navarre when I returned to Hanoi. There was no difficulty concerning the evacuation of Ma San and Phong Saly. But there was a difficult problem involving Lai Chau.

General Navarre went to Lai Chau and took me along to study the problem. At the end of this inspection he acknowledged the difficulties posed by the evacuation of Lai Chau. I proposed that we proceed with an operation envisaged by General Salan the year before, but which had not been carried out because of the lack of sufficient aircraft.

This was a matter of recapturing the Dien Bien Phu post. Actually Dien Bien Phu had been occupied by surprise on 28 November 1952 by a Viet battalion taken from the divisions encircling Ma San. The Dien Bien Phu post, which dated from before the war and had been occupied by a company of Senegalese snipers, could muster only slight resistance to the trained assault troops. But the Viet battalion was isolated and was in a relatively precarious situation.

At this time all of the people in the region were favorable to us. Therefore it was possible, if the means were given to us, to establish an underground zone there, or at least to arm several villages.

For this operation General Salan had anticipated three parachute battalions supported by the Chasse and several B-26's. As EMO head in Tonkin, I had been given the duty of preparing the airborne operation in liaison with Col. de Bollardiere, the TAPI commander. In addition, as GCMA commander, north of Dien Bien Phu I had had about 600 partisans stationed; partisans led by Captain Chaumette, Lt. Castagnoni and four noncommissioned officers who left Lai Chau on 15 December.

Several days later they were properly set up and welcomed by the people. Their mission was to prevent any flight of Viet elements toward the north on the day the paratroopers were to drop, and then to go down into the hollow to make contact with the paratroopers. I asked Col. de Bollardiere to command this operation on the ground myself, which did not pose any difficulty. Once the Dien Bien Phu post was retaken, it was anticipated that as soon as the airstrip was restored, the three battalions would be recovered and the Dien Bien Phu zone left to the GCMA for the establishment of underground fighters. But at this time almost all of the air potential was absorbed by supplying the entrenched camp of Na San and the Plaine des Jarres. General Salan therefore had to reject his plan.

I suggested to General Navarre that he retake Dien Bien Phu as had been envisaged the year before by General Salan, to evacuate the Lai Chau troops both by air and by land, to recondition the airfield, to remove all of the regular troops, and to leave this zone to the GCMA as anticipated, requesting him for the materiel to establish the underground fighters there.

In principle General Navarre was in agreement for the adoption of this solution. We shall see later how it was executed and why it failed.

The "Special Missions"

Our recent experiments and the contacts established had demonstrated to us that the overwhelming majority of the mountain peoples were favorable to us. They only hoped to become free of the hold of the enemies, whom they had always detested, and they counted on our aid to do this.

General Navarre had given us sufficient financial means. The Americans had consented to providing us with all of the armament we needed, along with radios. However, European staffs we had available were not sufficient for such an immense mission. Their replacement had to be prepared from native staffs. Consequently it became necessary to establish a method, a sort of regulation which would be applied methodically so that we could proceed rapidly and operate with certainty.

For this reason I summoned the chiefs of the Regional Representations to Saigon so that all of them would have an overview of the activity which I expected to conduct in close cooperation with the Commander-in-Chief. I asked them to tell me clearly, as a function of the climate in their regions and of their means, what possibilities there were for the people taking an active part in the battle against the Viet Minh.

Our experiments, and also our failures, had shown us that an underground could not be maintained and prove effective unless it had at least 1,000 armed men available with the support of 3,000 to 5,000 inhabitants. We had particularly learned that the European staffs were not always indispensable.

At that point the underground became practically impossible to uproot, and the Viet Minh was obliged to use extravagant means to reduce it. This was the stage which had to be reached quickly in the zones which appeared favorable to us, and these were the bases on which our study had to be made. Consequently I requested the chiefs of the Regional Representations to study a plan in this sense and to submit it to me.

Major Fournier, who had acquired great experience with the Tonkin underground fighters, produced a work of remarkable precision.

Then, with my General Staff and in close collaboration with my Regional Representation chiefs, I had a small brochure of about 30 pages compiled which was to be our Bible for the establishment of future undergrounds.

The mission of the underground fighters was precisely stated. It was: 1) to prevent the people from collaborating with the Viets; 2) to create a climate of permanent insecurity behind the Viets; and 3) to progressively lead the people to participate in the action, systematically destroying the political and military organizations installed by the Viets behind themselves. Therefore the underground activity was political and military. Their implantation could not be undertaken except in the general framework of the operations anticipated by the Commander-in-Chief.

The major features of this study were as follows:

--The study of the implantation of an underground is made on the request of the Commander-in-Chief. This means that an underground has a role to play within the framework of the operations conducted by the regular troops. Its implantation is delicate and time-consuming. That is why it must be anticipated far in advance, to fit into the framework of the future operations.

--Once the decision is made to implant an underground, a geographic and human study of the region must proceed rapidly with a determination of the principal points of Viet implantation.

This study, necessary to recognize the reasonable chances of success, took two weeks and required an officer to make two or three air missions into the regions.

If the zone studied presented difficulties, an officer, the leader of the mission for this possible underground, was designated. It was anticipated that he would be assigned four or five noncommissioned officers with the required training.

Responsible for training recruits, they would eventually become the leaders of the future undergrounds.

It was necessary to find a native leader who, in liaison with the mission officer-leader, would recruit the man responsible for the first contact missions: the Special Missions (MS). They were chosen from among the soldiers of the Vietnam units or of the French Union, or from among volunteer civilian refugees. This recruitment was conducted among all of those who had preserved friendships and, if possible, had some authority in the area. These preliminary contacts lasted for about a month and cost 100,000 piastres.

Then the volunteers were assembled and, after selection, classified into three categories: combatants, radio operators (sound and radiograms), and intelligence agents.

About 60 men were needed. Once these first recruits were assembled, the Special Mission training began immediately. It lasted two and a half months. It was necessary to have 200,000 piastres available for the Special Mission pay and for the support of their families.

This training included a common element for the three categories designated above: politics, morale, military and parachute training; and a specialization element: combat (50% of the manpower), radio operation (25%) and intelligence (25%).

At the end of this training period the people of value for the Special Missions were selected. They formed the Special Mission teams, the composition of which was approximately as follows:

- A leader (usually taken from among those who had received combat training,
- A radio operator (sound), and
- Two intelligence agents.

In the beginning the number of Special Mission teams necessary was about ten.

Those who did not form part of the Special Missions continued their training. The training of the radiogram operators was continued to the end.

Thus it was possible to envisage the implantation of Special Missions, with the means necessary to reach this phase in the formation of an underground being as follows:

--200,000 piastres (the Special Missions in operation receive special bonuses. It is absolutely necessary to support their families).

--15 ;reconnaissance missions,

--4 dropping aircraft,

--10 SCR 536 radios, and

--10 ground-to-air semaphore signals.

The mission of each Special Mission team was well defined. It bore on the following points:

Populace: state of morale, contact with local leaders, and beginning of infiltration and discreet propaganda, recruitment of volunteer underground fighters;

Viet Minh: implantation of regional and people's troops, combat value, and implantation of regular troops.

At the most favorable time the Special Missions were to overrun the chosen zone, their establishment generally taking place by night parachute drops, and sometimes by sea. The night drops had the advantage of being very discreet and of avoiding a long approach march, which was always delicate and difficult.

In principle the Spacial Missions had to be independent and work initially near a village, known well to at least one of the agents, and in which it was possible to renew old friendships. The contacts had to be established bit by bit. This phase was to last one to two months.

The return of the Special Missions was not made totally within the team. It was necessary that contacts be maintained. Half of the team, including the radio operator, remained on the spot. The Special Mission leader returned, bringing with him the volunteers intended to form the commando base needed for the implantation phase.

Then the Special Mission team leaders had to be assembled again to take a supplementary instruction course for the purpose of training them as underground fighter team leaders. The training of the Commando the new recruits were to enter was pushed to the limit.

The use of all the information received then made it possible for the Mission Chief of the underground to:

- Delimit the underground zone in a precise way,
- Fix the landing zones,
- Establish the order of communication in broadcasting, and
- To make provisions for armament, radios, various pieces of equipment and rations.

During this phase, which lasted about two months, all the means necessary for the future underground fighter had to be assembled at the intended base to insure its logistic support. Once the means were assembled, the training finished and the underground zone well-defined, the implementation was to be implemented as soon as possible. It was implemented in this way.

Preceding the underground chief by several days, the team chiefs were dropped into the zone which they knew well, and immediately organized their fighter teams. They would suppress the political officials (the Can Bo troops), and disorganize the people's troops to facilitate the establishment of the underground.

The underground chief would follow with his Commando at full strength and with his radio equipment. He would arm his teams with the weapons parachuted upon his request. These weapons would allow them to immediately establish their authority and to obstruct all activity on the part of the people's or regional Viet elements.

Once this phase was completed, the development and extension of the underground zone would be a function of the qualities of the leader and the reactions of the enemy.

Summary of Means for a Force of 1,000

We have seen that a force of 1,000 armed men was necessary for the guerrilla activities conducted by an underground to be profitable, it being understood that a minimum of 2,000 to 3,000 inhabitants had to contribute their assistance. There was no overlooking the fact that a larger force in an underground was easily located, because of lack of space, and the Viets could rapidly encircle and annihilate it.

Therefore the means studied ahead of time had been based on these facts.

Financing

During the first three months it was necessary to have \$150,000 available for pay and to support the recruits' families. During the next four months \$200,000 were necessary per month for the Special Mission salary, the underground chiefs and rations.

Support of an underground fighter in one place costs \$250,000 for pay, food and the economic support of the zone. There was no hope of reducing this sum. Actually an underground fighter who had accepted a rifle and whom we asked to devote all his time to the underground could no longer work. It was necessary to assure his subsistence and that of his family.

In addition it was necessary to form staffs within the underground so that they could become commanders. The Cape Saint-Jacques School specialized in the training of native underground fighter officers. In 40 days of intense instruction they received the material essential for commanding about 40 men. In order to increase their prestige they also had to be given a uniform and pay, certainly low but becoming a significant expense in view of their number.

Air Potential

The monthly tonnage to be parachuted to an underground of 1,000 armed men was about 100 tons. This figure may seem large, but it was calculated as closely as possible.

All of the underground fighters together, established north of Ma San to permit evacuation of the camp with complete security and including 3,500 armed men, received 300 tons of armament, rations and diverse materiel per month, while more than 120 tons were parachuted daily to Ma San.

Radio Materiel

To guarantee secure communication both within the underground and outside of it, the underground had to have available:

- 20 SCR 536 (ground-to-air communication),
- 4 SCR 694 (internal communication and communication with the Central Office),
- 10 NCR 300 (commando and ground-to-air communication), and
- 10 sets of semaphore signals for various parachute drops.

Armament

The arms were distributed on the request of the underground leader in lots of 100 weapons, including 3 FM, 15 PM, 82 rifles and a 60 mm mortar in every second lot.

European Personnel

The mountaineers whom we recruited were rough people, without training, and ignorant of the entire world outside of their mountain or their valley. Consequently it was very difficult to find the characteristics necessary for minor technicians (radio operators, team leaders, etc.), necessary to create the skeleton of an organization subject to control. For radio operators, for example, we had noted that the Meo boys 12 to 15 years old learned how to handle the equipment and how to code messages much more easily than their elders. They are the ones who were used.

The length of a training course did not have a limit. The pupils did not leave a course until they were truly trained. Sometimes it took six to eight months to train radiogram operators.

In order to alleviate this major inconvenience and to obtain a fast beginning, European staffs were employed. But, with rare exceptions, the European was not very adaptable to the underground life in Indochina. He could not live in the brush for a long time. He spoke the language poorly. Having at his disposal only poor interpreters, he did not make himself understood well. Finally, he could not go unnoticed for a long time. His presence was quickly made known to the Viets, who had spies everywhere. For an underground fighter in training this very fact constituted a danger.

Moreover, in critical periods the European constituted a serious handicap. The natives, who naturally had confidence in him, had a tendency to group around him hoping that he could guide them. They then lost the spirit of initiative which constituted their entire value. Now, left to themselves, they could find solutions which no European was capable of envisaging because of their knowledge of the country and its capabilities, their adaptation to the local living conditions, their primitive instinct sharpened by danger, and their resistance, which is much higher than ours.

For all of these reasons, the policy which I recommended was to leave the native staffs with the greatest initiative and the maximum responsibility. For that, however, it was necessary to train them. Therefore the Cape Saint-Jacques Training Center would be a veritable training center for the underground fighters. I asked that, as far as possible, since the judgment was left to the Regional Representation leaders, the European personnel be used in the following way:

- a) In the underground: two teams of two noncommissioned officers on a temporary mission as technical advisors for the underground leaders, in

particular for the organization of internal bases and to guarantee execution of the missions;

b) In the Central Office: one officer who followed the development and extension of the underground, established plans for providing supplies and ration rations, ammunition, clothing and various pieces of materiel, and also supervised the execution of missions.

He went into the field as often as possible so that the human contact was never lost, as did the Regional Representation leader, who did so very often.

An assistant noncommissioned officer was particularly involved with: parachute drops, evacuation of wounded, and Special Mission training, always necessary to extend the underground.

Therefore the creation of the undergrounds was to pass from the craft stage to the traveling regime. Thus our goal was not only the missions which had been initially fixed for us by the SDECE in its basic documents, namely: to create an underground, to form sabotage teams, and to set up escape routes.

It consisted of occupying and liberating all of the High Region from the presence of the Viet Minh. Now this goal was within reach. We had the means for it. The method had been developed and was known perfectly by those responsible at all echelons. Success was only a matter of time.

These directives were broadcast to all of the Regional Representations as they were edited, in order not to lose time. The advice of their leaders was regularly requested, most of the time by a personal letter so that they could raise criticism if they felt it necessary.

It became evident that the Cape Saint-Jacques Training Center alone could not furnish all of the necessary staffs and specialists.

Each Regional Representation was asked to create its own training center for itself in order to train its minor staffs and minor specialists, and especially

one or more intervention commandos capable of acting on request within a definite underground in case of difficulties.

Actually they were intended to replace the 3rd ECCP which General Gilles had unfortunately taken from us. Cape Saint-Jacques reserved to itself the training of staffs of relatively high rank, in particular the underground officers, the radiogram specialists for important posts, and intelligence agents capable of serving as monitors in the undergrounds.

Finally, all of the officers coming from France and assigned to the GCMA went through a course there for about a month in order to get into the scheme of things quickly.

The various orientation documents were compiled into the small brochure which was sent to the Regional Representations, to the various general staffs and to the SDECE Office in Paris, so that all of the people interested in the action which we were going to conduct would be aware of my methods.

This effort was particularly directed toward the training of native underground officers. The underground cadets were selected by the underground leaders from among their best elements, those who had the most aptitude for command. In principle they were intended to take over a number of men equivalent to a section.

Captain Pradere-Niquet, who commanded the Cape Saint-Jacques Training Center, was responsible for establishing a 40-day program during which the cadets would learn the essentials of what they would have to apply in the underground.

This program eliminated everything which was not absolutely necessary in an underground. It was submitted to the Regional Representation Leaders so that they could propose any modifications they felt useful. The most developed portion of the program concerned the ground-to-air communication to guide the bombers to their objectives, signalling the dropping zones for the parachutes, armament and rations, laying mines, etc.

The first course, including about 40 pupils from the Laos and Tonkin undergrounds, began in August 1953.

On leaving it the pupils were appointed underground junior lieutenants. They were certified parachutists, received the regulation insignia and were given a complete paratrooper uniform. Their junior lieutenant stripes were given to them during a short ceremonial parade by the School Commander or by me.

The first class left at the beginning of October 1953. They were all excellent elements who rendered great service to the underground leaders and gave them the greatest command opportunities. Among them should be cited Van Pao, a Meo, one of the best and most dynamic men, who was able to learn to command an underground rapidly. Several years later the Americans made him a general commanding all of the Laotian undergrounds.

Once the course was over, the "graduating" pupils were parachuted to their underground, the command staff of which was thus progressively improved.

The importance which the GCMA was to assume justified a special administration service for the funds and resources which were given to us. Although considerable, they were not unlimited. We had left with reduced administrative means, cutting expenses to the bone, but it had become necessary to organize the entire administration on solid bases. This was done in the course of each Regional Representation, thanks to Colonel Gracieux.

It was essential to not undertake the creation of an underground unless we had formal assurance of having all necessary means. Abandoning a Special Mission which had contacted and engaged people responding favorably to our appeal would have had a disastrous effect. We were not to act except on a sure thing.

Therefore I asked the Regional Representation chiefs to send me each month, for the following month, their anticipated expenses so that I could approve them, study the possibility of satisfying them and, in case of difficulties, of studying the methods to procure the necessary resources.

We have seen that an underground fighter active in one place costs more and more. Therefore I set up a fairly large reserve fund to meet all unanticipated situations.

Thus, in sending the directives to the various Regional Representation leaders, I asked them never to forget that the capabilities of the Indochina Expeditionary Corps were limited and they always had to be ready for their requests to be incompletely satisfied.

I reminded them that history had no examples of a military leader obtaining all of the means desired to execute a mission levied on them, but that the property of a valuable leader was precisely to succeed with the means available, and with them alone.

The Evacuation of Na San

The GCMA was going to put into operation all of its means to permit the execution of the Navarre plan, i.e., the evacuation of Na San, Phong Saly and Lai Chau.

The underground fighters installed by Captain Hebert with 5 non-commissioned officers in the mountainous plateau northwest of Na San included 3,500 armed fighters. They held RP 41 between Son La and Dien Bien Phu for more than 20 kilometers. I had asked Major Fournier to study with Hebert a precise plan to facilitate the evacuation of Na San by air with complete security. This plan had been developed. It aimed at a surprise occupation of the city of Son La on RP 41 15 kilometers northwest of Na San, the day before the date anticipated for the evacuation. Not very numerous at this time, the Viets would be obliged to assemble all of their troops to recapture it. Then it was necessary to occupy the highway between Son La and Na San to prevent the Viets from returning toward the entrenched camp. Finally, the principal points of support evacuated by the regular troops would be occupied by the underground fighters. Captain Hebert himself would direct the operation.

The beginning of the evacuation of Na San had been anticipated by General Navarre for 5 August. Hebert took his position in the entrenched camp on 1 August.

During the night of 3-4 August the 1,000 partisans of Chatel, coming from the Colibri underground, entered by surprise the city of Son La, the rear base of the Viet 88th Regiment held by regional troops. They offered only slight resistance and surrendered.

During the day on 4 August elements of the 88th, in position around Na San, attacked to retake Son La. Hebert let them enter the city. But Schneider's 1,000 partisans from Calamar blockaded the highway up to Na San, while Chatel badgered the 88th in Son La day and night.